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ABSTRACT

Parents of adolescents with attention deficit disorders are offered suggestions for easing the transition of their teen from elementary to secondary school. Careful scheduling of classes with the guidance counselor to "fit" the individual teen's needs is urged. The importance of ongoing communication with the school concerning class progress, medication effectiveness, and compliance with legal requirements is stressed. As homework is an area in which many issues and concerns arise, specific suggestions are given for helping the teen in: recording assignments and getting the materials home, planning homework time, consistently doing the homework, turning in completed assignments on time, and planning and completing long term projects. Suggestions are also given for helping the teen organize his/her notebook, implementing individualized classroom interventions, and communicating with the teen. (DB)

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Secondary School Transition: Planning for Success

by Rae Hemphill, Chapter Coordinator

The transition into secondary school can be overwhelming and cause much anxiety in both the ADD adolescent and the parent. Many concerns arise regarding the new environment and how to manage it. Preparing for this journey can assist in adjusting to these changes and produce positive results.

Issues or concerns exist about the new school, changing classes, class scheduling, schooi communication, homework, and classroom interventions. Medication and teen advocacy are issues that are also of concern during the time an ADD teen attends a secondary school program. Each of these issues can have a successful outcome, especially when a proactive approach is used. Anticipating issues and addressing them early as they relate to each individual teen can de-escalated concerns and prevent problems.

ORIENTING TO THE SECONDARY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Attendance at a new school is like a new beginning and should be treated as such. You can prepare your ADD teen for a smoother transition by scheduling a tour of the facility prior to the start of the new school year. You will want to locate the various service areas such as the library, cafeteria, administrative offices, and rest rooms. Using the teen's class schedule, walk from class to class noting any "walks" that could result in tardiness. Tardiness in secondary school generally is the result of socializing, searching for lost materials, or returning to the locker to retrieve forgotten items. For those long "walks", brainstorm with the teen how to reduce the amount of time it takes. If it seems impossible to reduce the time, discuss this item with the guidance counselor before it has a chance to become an issue with negative consequences.

The transition from one or two teachers to as many as seven can be quite disconcerting to the teen. Each teacher will have their own style of presentation, body language, and expectations for the students. Each one will likely expect the teen to perform independently and not require monitoring. When a teacher is not willing to compromise with the teen on student expectations, s/he may have no other choice than to do "it" the teacher's way. As a parent, you will need to foster this environment as one which prepares the teen for the future. The teen needs to know that many situations can occur in adulthood, such as dealing with employers, which require rule-based actions and problem solving skills similar to having multiple teachers, each with their own set of expectations. Learning to deal with these expectations gives the teen experiences s/he can draw on in the future. Teens can be encouraged to express to the parent or guidance counselor reasonable requests for assistance.

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CLASS SCHEDULING

The daily class schedule is an issue for many teens. The schedule, which is generally produced by a computer, may not perfectly "fit" the teen's needs or produce success.

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"Hand scheduling" of classes with the guidance counselor just prior to school opening could produce a more appropriate environment for learning. Consider using the following methods to create a schedule that betters meets your teen's needs:

- Schedule core academic classes, such as English, math, history, and foreign languages, early in the day if the teen is a "morning" person.
- Alternate core academic classes with electives if the teen needs a longer period of time to be mentally ready for the next academic class.
- Plan core academic classes when medication will be most effective.
- Request a teacher whose teaching style is a match to the teen's primary learning style.
- Request a teacher who has personal attributes which match the teen's and consider how the teen will relate to him/her.

Even though you may have used some or all of the above methods to facilitate your teen's schedule, selecting a class of study which may be "not working" can happen. If it does, take immediate action to change it to one which will likely produce better results. As an example, a teen has chosen a geometry class to fill a math requirement. If failing grades become quite evident approximately 3-4 weeks into the quarter and are caused by the inability to comprehend the subject matter, initiate immediate action with the guidance counselor to replace it with a different type of math where success can be more prevalent.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL

Parent communication with the school is a necessity for all concerned. Best results can be attained when a working partnership exists between the parents, teen's teachers, guidance counselor, school psychologist, school administration, and support staff. Employing a proactive approach will produce better results than one of reaction. Providing the school personnel with information of what has occurred in prior school years and what was successful in managing those issues will prepare them for what may occur during the teen's tenure in secondary school. Also, you will want to stress the need for feedback in the following areas:

- About class progress - assignments, tests, participation, comprehension of the subject matter, class participation, homework
- From teacher - find out how to contact each teacher and the best method for each of them to provide progress reports or notify you of other matters
- To monitor medication effectiveness - have teacher communicate changes in the teen's classroom behavior and ability to attend to assignments

- To monitor 504 progress - have teacher communicate how the classroom interventions are working and which ones are not working and should be replaced

Expressing your concerns and interest in your teen prior to the time problems or situations arise prepares school personnel for them. Awareness promotes the ability to monitor and take action before a situation has the chance to escalate. In some cases, methods employed by the teacher can eliminate a problem or greatly minimize it.

HOMEWORK HASSLES

Homework is the single school activity which can produce many issues and concerns in the areas of:

- Recording assignments and getting the materials home
- Planning time for homework to get done
- Doing the homework, consistently
- Turning in completed assignments on time
- Planning and completing long term projects

Each of these items requires organization and/or planning to get a successful conclusion.

Homework assignment sheets or notebooks can be used by the teen to collect the assignments during the classroom period. A separate section or special place in the teen's notebook should house them. Have your teen get names and phone number of students who would be willing to be called upon during a time of "crisis". These study mates can provide back up when an assignment is overlooked or a book is not brought home.

Homework will need to get done along with other activities the teen is involved in. A routine time for doing homework should be established with the understanding there will be exceptions. A "month-at-a-glance" type of calendar allows all activities, homework and non-homework activities, to be recorded. It provides a visual picture of what is happening on any given day. When a teen can see, daily activities, such as a dentist appointment at 3 p.m., soccer practice at 5 p.m., s/he can fit homework activities around them even though the routine homework time is different.

Homework should be done in an environment that is best for the teen. This may mean the teen will work best if music is being played. Some study better with the volume low while others need it louder. Still others may find studying in a quiet room with the door shut is more productive. The teen should be allowed to choose the environment, and the parent should intervene only when progress is not being made. You will need to find creative ways to monitor your teen's progress without being a big intrusion.

Getting the completed assignments turned in is a common issue with ADD teens. Homework can get "lost" between when it is completed and time to turn it in. One solution for this problem is to have a pocket folder in the notebook where all completed work can be stored. If work continues to become lost, one pocket folder per class may produce better results.

Probably the biggest homework issue is a long term project, one that is assigned several weeks ahead of its due date, or in the case of an ADD teen, one that you hear about the day before it is due. Some teachers will provide parents a list of long term assignments and their approximate due dates for the entire year or each quarter. Once you know an assignment is due, assist your teen with planning the project. Help him/her to begin the planning by prompting him/her for what type of project will be done, what supplies will be required to complete the project, and what the steps will be to complete the project. More success occurs when dealing with small portions over a several day period.

NOTEBOOK ORGANIZATION

Organization of the teen's notebook can help produce success. The notebook can be to the student what a "planner" is to an adult. It can guide and facilitate the teen's actions and help keep items available for use. The following are suggestions for good notebook organization:

- A 1 ½" to 2 ½" D-slant notebook (it holds more than the traditional round ring notebook)
- Three-holed zippered pouch to hold pens, pencils, calculator, compass, protractor, and other items
- Three-holed ruler secured in the notebook
- Three-holed divider indexes -- there should be one index for each class, one for assignments and calendars, and one for classmates addresses and phone numbers (who can be called when an emergency exists)
- A good supply of three-holed notebook paper and one-quarter inch grid paper
- Three-holed pocket folder to transport worksheets and homework back and forth between home and school

Daily, after all homework is complete, you should check the folder used to transport information to and from school to confirm that all assignments are complete and ready for transport to school the next day. Weekly notebook and backpack checks ensure all worksheet and notes have been three-holed punched and filed in the right section for future reference.

CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS

Classroom interventions may be needed to assist the teen and allow s/he the ability to compete with peers. Interventions are plans that need to be individually selected to meet a specific need and can be changed or modified. The specific interventions should be matched to the teen's learning style. For optimal success, they should have the teen's agreement and participation when implemented. If there are many issues that need addressing, prioritize which ones should be dealt with first and be willing to negotiate on the strategies for improvement. Implement those that everyone agrees with and monitor them at predetermined intervals. Continue those that produce success and replace those that "just do not work".

MEDICATION EFFECTIVENESS

ADD teens who use medication as part of their treatment plan may have to make changes if its effectiveness diminishes. Some will require a dosage adjustment while others may require a different medication. Side effects that were non-existent when younger may become a problem during adolescence. If this should occur, you and your teen should discuss this issue with the prescribing physician. Another problem occurring in some teens is the refusal to take medication. Try to determine the reason for the refusal, since there may be a way for you, your teen, and the physician to successfully deal with it.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE TEEN

As your teen progresses through adolescence, s/he will distance herself/himself from you. To maintain a good relationship with your teen, you may need to make changes in methods that have been successful in prior years. Peer or adult tutoring may have to replace parent tutoring. Communication with your teen should be brief and to the point as long discussions will cause the teen to "tune out". When that happens, you will be the only one who hears what is being said. Allow your teen the opportunity to participate in the decision making process. When making plans, offer them choices, solicit their opinions and ideas, and let them make the selections.

Emotional development and impulsive reaction in ADD teens contribute to moodiness above the normal changes in adolescence. You can affirm emotional outbursts by acknowledging, "I know you are frustrated about ... (the issue at hand). I feel that way sometimes myself." Or you can get them thinking by asking "I wonder if ... (a method that might help)." Showing understanding for their emotions will help them better deal with the issue.

FROM ONE PARENT TO ANOTHER

The goal of all parents is to prepare their child for the realities of the real world. You need to provide the environment for the teen to learn, but it is up to the teen to choose to learn. Become a consultant to your teen; do not do his/her work. If you have been instrumental in completing your teen's assignments, reduce your level of assistance gradually.

Understand your teen's need for independence and self-sufficiency. Keep the communication lines open between you and your teen. All of these things are necessary for your teen to be able to assume the responsibility for his/her life after high school graduation.

Never under estimate your teen's abilities. Identify their strengths to use for coping and to feel good about themselves. Involve her/him in school meetings and encourage participation and input. Invite "ownership" by providing choices. Allow the teen to "stumble, fall, and pick herself/himself up" even though it may be difficult for you to do so. You may be pleasantly surprised at how well s/he will adapt to the invited independencies.

Now educated with the strategies that have been successful for others, you can be proactive by planning, using a "team" management approach, and involving you teen as much as possible to create success during the secondary school years. When it comes time for your teen to graduate, you will know it was worth each and every effort you put forth while assisting her/him in becoming a successful, independent, and self-sufficient young adult.